

Luke 24:44-53 (The Ascension of Our Lord—Observed)**“Proclamation in Jesus’ Name”****Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Enfield CT****May 16, 2021**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our text for this morning is the Gospel Reading from Luke 24:

⁴⁴And [Jesus] said to them, “This is my word which I spoke to you while I was with you, that it was necessary to fulfill all the things written in the Law of Moses and in the Prophets and in the Psalms concerning me.” ⁴⁵Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶And He said to them, “Thus it stands written for the Christ to suffer and to be raised from the dead on the third day ⁴⁷and repentance for the forgiveness of sins to be proclaimed in His name into all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹And behold, I myself am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But as for you, you remain in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” ⁵⁰And He led them out as far as Bethany and raised His hands and blessed them. ⁵¹And it happened that while He was blessing them, He departed from them and was taken up into heaven. ⁵²And these, after worshiping Him, they returned to Jerusalem with great joy. ⁵³And they were always in the temple praising God.

Forty days after His resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, bodily ascended into heaven. The Church celebrated Ascension Day this past Thursday and so we are observing this Festival today. At the end of his second volume, the Book of Acts, St. Luke presents us with an account of Jesus’ Ascension even as he does at the end of his first volume, his Gospel. On the basis of Luke’s Gospel, we take time to consider this morning Jesus’ Ascension into heaven and what that means for His Church—for you, the baptized people of God in Christ.

In England around the 720s A.D., a theologian and priest named Bede the Venerable preached, “‘It was necessary for the Christ to suffer and rise from the dead on the third day,’ [Jesus] said, ‘and for you to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name among all nations.’ This was certainly a necessary sequence. First, Christ had to shed his blood for the redemption of the world. Then, through his resurrection and ascension, he opened to human

beings the gate of the heavenly kingdom. Last, he sent those who would preach to all nations throughout the world the word of life and [to] administer the sacraments of faith" (*Homilies on the Gospels* 11.9).

This "necessary sequence," as Bede called it, includes Christ's Ascension. The Lord Jesus, who had been appearing at various times and places to His disciples all throughout these forty days, met with them one final time before being taken up into heaven. As He had done for the disciples on the road to Emmaus, now He did for them all, opening their minds to understand the things concerning Himself written in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms—the entire Old Testament as we call it. It stands written, Jesus said, that the Christ would suffer. And He did. He was nailed to a cross where He shed His blood to make atonement of the sins of the whole world. He suffered hell and death in humanity's place, purchasing with His holy, precious blood the forgiveness of sins.

And on the third day, just forty days before, Jesus rose again from death. His resurrection is the comforting testimony that He is indeed the Son of God—He "was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 1:4 ESV). God the Father has accepted Christ's sacrifice for the reconciliation of the world—"For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life" (Rom. 5:10 ESV). And all who believe in Christ will rise to eternal life—"Because I live, you also will live" (John 14:19 ESV).

But the Scriptures reveal something else. It is not only written for the Christ to suffer and to be raised, but it is also written that repentance for the forgiveness of sins be

proclaimed in Jesus' name to all the nations. The Gospel is meant to be told! "You are witness of these things." That's you too, for you are Jesus' disciples.

What a great and awesome responsibility God's gives us as people who have been Baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ! We get to proclaim and to announce that Jesus Christ has died for the sins of the world. He is risen and has defeated sin, Satan, and death. There is abundant forgiveness of sins for all who repent and long for the mercy of God in Christ.

So why do you hesitate? Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners from eternal death and hell. Oh, I see. You're not really comfortable sharing God's Law with others. You don't like the idea of holding the mirror of God's Law up to your own face so that you see clearly that you are not what God would have you be by nature and you certainly don't want to take on that task before others. But the Law shows you your sins and your total need for a Savior from sin and the punishment of eternal death. The Law drives you to despair and sorrow over your sins of thought, desire, word, and action. The Law compels you to cry out, "Lord, have mercy on me a sinner," for Jesus Christ is then your only hope of salvation. And so with faith you trust in the promise of God. You believe, by grace through faith, that the Christ has suffered the punishment of death and hell for your sins in your place. You trust that Jesus has died to win your forgiveness from all your sins and that He applies that forgiveness to you through His Gospel Word that you hear proclaimed, through the water and Word in Holy Baptism, and in the eating and drinking of Christ's true Body and Blood with the bread and wine in the Sacrament of the Altar. Won't you share that message of Law and Gospel with other people?

If you, the Church, do not, nobody else will. In fact, the Lord Christ has only empowered His Church to be proclaimers of repentance and the forgiveness of sins by sending His people the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "And behold, I myself am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But as for you, you remain in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." If Jesus didn't ascend into heaven, He could not have sent the promised power from on high, God the Holy Spirit. Jesus said in the Upper Room, "Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment" (John 16:7–8 ESV). So Jesus returned to heaven, seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. And He has kept His promise so that His disciples might be His witnesses.

On the Day of Pentecost, which we will celebrate next Sunday, God the Father and God the Son poured out the Holy Spirit in power on the chosen disciples, and they proclaimed the Scriptures—the Law and the Gospel. They preached repentance and the forgiveness of sins. Read the Book of Acts, Luke's second volume. The preaching of repentance and forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus Christ began in Jerusalem and then moved into Judea and Samaria and then to the ends of the earth—to all nations! As Peter told Cornelius in Acts 10, "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. . . . And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (Acts 10:34–43 ESV).

You, O people of God, are equipped with the gift of the Holy Spirit. He has been poured out upon you in Baptism. He is working through the proclamation of God's Word to deliver to you the forgiveness of sins and the power to proclaim repentance and forgiveness in Jesus' name to others. "The promise of the Gospel is universal, that is, it belongs to all people. . . . It is Christ's command that this promise of the Gospel also should be offered to everyone in common to whom repentance is preached" (Luke 24:47).¹ You are witnesses of these things. You are messengers of this Gospel, empowered by the Spirit to speak the truth of Christ and to proclaim repentance and forgiveness in His name.

This Gospel was first shared with you. Maybe you were brought to the font by your Christian parents to receive faith, forgiveness, and salvation through Baptism. Maybe you heard the Gospel proclaimed in the name of Jesus and the Holy Spirit created saving faith in your heart through that hearing. Through the Word you received forgiveness of sins and the life everlasting. Like you, other people need to hear that message. Christ has kept His promise. You have the power of the Spirit to share the Gospel—the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins!

In the Chapel of the Holy Apostles under Luther Tower on the campus of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, there is an altar with these words inscribed on it: "How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?" (Rom. 10:14–15 ESV). Quite appropriate for a seminary that

¹ Paul Timothy McCain, ed., *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2005), 606.

prepares pastors and deaconesses who are sent with the message of the Gospel into the congregations of our Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. But those words from Romans 10 are not just for church workers. They are questions that every man, woman, and child with faith in Christ must answer by the power and grace of the Holy Spirit.

How then will they call on [Jesus] in whom they have not believed? They won't.

And how are they to believe in Jesus of whom they have never heard? They won't.

And how are they to hear without someone preaching? They can't.

And how are they to preach unless they are sent?

Jesus sends you in the power of the Holy Spirit with the message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. This is the gift that Jesus won for the world with His death and resurrection. It is your gift by grace through faith. Your sins are forgiven. You have eternal life. And you are witnesses of the Crucified and Risen Lord Jesus Christ. With great joy through the Spirit, worship your God and Savior. Receive His gifts from this altar, font, and pulpit. And then go and proclaim His Good News. Amen.